DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 427 818 JC 990 121

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| AUTHOR | Kuo, Elaine W. |
| TITLE | Creating Beneficial Institutional Collaborations. ERIC Digest. |
| INSTITUTION | ERIC Clearinghouse for Community Colleges, Los Angeles, CA. |
| SPONS AGENCY | Office of Educational Research and Improvement (ED), Washington, DC. |
| REPORT NO | EDO-JC-99-02 |
| PUB DATE | 1999-02-00 |
| NOTE | 4p. |
| CONTRACT | ED-99-CO-0010 |
| PUB TYPE | ERIC Publications (071) -- ERIC Digests in Full Text (073) -- Reports - Descriptive (141) |
| EDRS PRICE | MF01/PC01 Plus Postage. |
| DESCRIPTORS | Access to Education; *Community Colleges; *Institutional Mission; Organizational Change; *Partnerships in Education; *School Business Relationship; *School Community Relationship; Two Year Colleges |
| IDENTIFIERS | ERIC Digests |

ABSTRACT

This digest examines the value of collaborations among businesses, community organizations, and educational institutions, and explores how partnerships create new opportunities and challenges. The benefits of collaborative efforts for community colleges include: (1) furthering access and services to local constituents; (2) bridging secondary education and baccalaureate programs; and (3) promoting economic development. Many examples of different types of collaborations are given. Collaborations among local businesses, such as the Rural Community College Initiative, foster community partnerships and address local educational and employment barriers. The Bronx Corridor of Success Initiative links education and community development through collaboration among at-risk youths, the Bronx Community College (New York), and various community organizations. A collaboration between the New York University School of Education and eleven area community colleges is an example of a collaboration among educational institutions, created to improve transfer rates. Movement toward collaboration must be strategic and continuous. The goals of increasing access to higher education and enhancing community economic development continue to be the impetus that sustains these relationships between community colleges and external organizations. (AS)

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# ERIC Digest

# Creating Beneficial Institutional Collaborations

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Digest

February, 1999

EDO-JC-99-02

# Creating Beneficial Institutional Collaborations

by Elaine W. Kuo

The process of collaboration with external organizations can transform an institution. The term collaboration refers to the act of working with a limited group in a socially beneficial effort. This Digest examines the value of existing collaborative efforts with businesses, community organizations and other educational institutions, and explores how collaborative partnerships create new opportunities as well as challenges.

**Benefits**

Collaborative efforts assist community colleges in realizing their mission of promoting access and servicing their local constituents (McGrath). By connecting sections of the educational pipeline, community colleges bridge secondary education and baccalaureate programs (Wright and Middleberg; Lieberman). These cross-sector collaborations address issues on a vertical as well as horizontal level. Community colleges are also often involved in partnerships with local industries and community organizations to promote economic development.

**Collaborations with Local Businesses**

Garza and Eller demonstrate that a collaborative approach promotes community development by highlighting the interconnections between education, social services, and economic development. They refer to the work of the Rural Community College Initiative (RCCI), fosters community partnerships to address educational and employment barriers (Garza and Eller). Their strategies include developing partnerships with industries, increasing the availability of distance education, and fostering the growth of small businesses. The RCCI has grown to twenty-four institutions located across the nation in economically distressed areas.

The increase in student services and the promotion of entrepreneurship through business development centers contribute to community renewal by invigorating community leadership and establishing connection between the institution and its neighbors.

**Collaborations with Community Organizations**

The Bronx Corridor of Success Initiative (NY) links education and community development through collaboration among at-risk youth, the Bronx Community College (BCC), and various community organizations (Gillespie). The Bronx Corridor of Success not only increases information sharing and learning across different levels of the educational system, but also enhances BCC's ability to serve student needs by offering access to health care and workshops that increase parental participation (Gillespie). In the Academic Bridge Program, where eighth graders work two days a week with local high school writing teachers after school, a busing system was established so students could return home safely. This arrangement addresses parents' concern for the safety of their children. Likewise, the program acknowledges the connection between physical health and educational success by providing the participants in the Bronx Corridor of Success with dental care and immunizations.

As the senior director of collaborative programs at Bronx Community College, Gillespie maintains that once the vision, communication channels, and trust levels are established, then the collaborative effort can become self-sustaining. However, he acknowledges the need for continuous dialogue among all collaborative participants in order to maintain a clear sense of focus. Therefore, leaders need to be knowledgeable about the collaborative goals, and be patient, open, and flexible during the partnership process.

**Collaborations with Educational Institutions**

At New York University (NYU), concern for low transfer rates led to collaboration between the School of Education and eleven area community colleges (Wright and Middleberg). Prior to 1989, only fifteen to twenty community college students transferred each year to the School of Education. NYU expanded the existing articulation agreements, formed collegial relationships with community colleges and asked their faculty and counselors to nominate potential transfer students. NYU recognized the importance of a diverse and strong student body, but it could not achieve this goal without the cooperation of the community colleges.

One community college president, Carolyn Grubbs Williams, found that collaborations can prove to be an asset in addressing community educational concerns. She explains that the student-centered model relies on partnerships to encourage student progress throughout the K-16 pipeline. By combining the support of her office with increased participation in inter-institutional collaborative programs, Williams brought people together, developed their ideas on education, and disseminated their shared thoughts on effective learning strategies. Thus, as she demonstrated, effective leaders need to establish and maintain a shared vision while developing and reinforcing trust levels among the participants. This involves the ability to identify and

convey the connections between educational, employment, and community concerns facing an institution's constituents.

**Organizational Change**

Organizational change often results from collaborative efforts. A successful way to integrate this change is to build support for collaboration starting at the top (Wright and Middleberg). Support from the leaders of the various institutional partners can provide the impetus needed to begin and sustain collaborations. An enthusiastic president can create a climate where his/her staff can see the mutual benefits resulting from collaborations within and outside the campus (Williams).

Lundquist and Nixon suggest that such collaborative efforts ultimately place a spotlight on student development through the formation of community partnerships, and the development of new forms of planning and resource allocation. The Summer Scholars Transfer Institute (SSTI), a collaboration between Santa Ana College and the University of California, Irvine, prepares students for higher education by adopting a learner-centered focus (Lundquist and Nixon). Coalitions among faculty, counselors, and administrators led to shifts in the organizational structure as well as the development of a new organizational culture. Compartmentalization of student services and academic affairs ended as participants reexamined the purpose of resource and program development and shifted to a learner-centered focus. This effort established a culture that promoted collective responsibility for access and equity.

**Assessment**

Assessment projects must be approached thoughtfully because they are complex endeavors (Rendon, Gans, and Calleroz). Sometimes, participants are concerned about interpretations made by an outside group such as a funding agency. Attention must be given not only to the unique design of each program but also the methods used in collecting and examining the data.

The assessment process used to examine the Ford Foundation's Urban Partnership Program included both quantitative and qualitative components. Rendon, Gans, and Calleroz examined the level of systemic change that occurred and how it affected student outcomes. Their assessment also served to inform others of the factors that contribute to the success or failure of collaborative efforts. They note that assessment is most useful when seen as an informative, rather than judgmental, tool. The assessment staff also needs to involve local evaluation experts and members of the collaborative effort. As in any collaboration, ideas need to be continuously exchanged and reviewed. In the end, assessment needs to be integrated and established as a permanent part of the partnership.

An assessment of any collaborative project can further inspire participants' commitment. Successful student outcomes make the benefits of these efforts tangible. Williams notes that the on-going assessment of the Los Angeles Partners Advocating Student Success helps the group maintain their credibility and reminds the collaborative partners of the organization's goal to increase the educational prospects of students in the Los Angeles Unified School District.

**Conclusion**

This Digest refers to collaborative models that illustrate the utility of these partnerships for institutions that strive to better serve their students. Movement toward collaboration must be strategic and continuous. The goals of increasing access and enhancing community economic development to higher education continues to be the impetus that sustains relationships between community colleges and external organizations.

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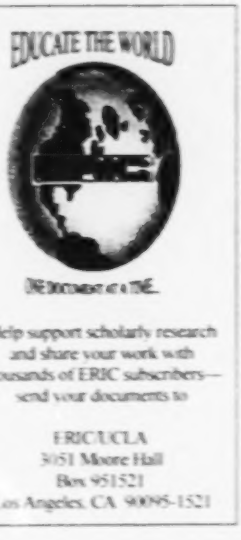


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